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SUBJECT: PARAGUAY: TIP VICTIMS RECOUNT THEIR EXPERIENCES

11. SUMMARY: On 7/20, A/Pol and Pol Intern met with Graciela Zelaya, Director of the Office of Women's Support and the Center for Trafficking Victims in the Secretariat of Women's Issues, to discuss the parameters for a meeting with three recently repatriated victims. POL had requested the meeting with the TIP victims to gain better insight into their experience in terms of the recruitment process, living conditions and recovery. In a meeting on the same day, Pol Intern met with one of the TIP victims guided by a Paraguayan psychiatrist. In their meetings with the Pol Intern and the Paraguayan psychiatrist, the TIP victims spoke frankly about their experience, including their successful effort to return home. End Summary.

The Recruitment

12. On 7/20, Pol Intern sat in a meeting, directed by a psychiatrist, with one of the TIP victims describing their experience. (NOTE: Graciela Zelaya, Director of the Office of Women's Support and the Center for Trafficking Victims in the Secretariat of Women's Issues, specifically requested the female Pol Intern participate in the meeting vice male PolOff. End Note.) According to the psychiatrist, each of the three female victims indicated that they were approached by women, who asked them if they had a job and if they would be interested in working in Argentina. One woman, from the town of Ypane in the Central Department just south of Asuncion, was approached in a health clinic waiting room while the other two women were recruited by people they identified as "friends." Once they agreed to consider employment in Argentina, the women were given the telephone number of a man by the name of "Antonio" (no last name given). (NOTE: The women were told that they would be working as waitresses in a restaurant and/or maids in a hotel but nothing related to prostitution. End Note.)

13. Antonio facilitated all of the preparations on the Paraguayan side. He arranged for their travel documents, bus tickets and hotel stays in Asuncion. Prior to boarding the bus, Antonio gave them their documents. He told them he would not be traveling with them but gave them instructions about what to do upon arrival in Buenos Aires. According to one of the victims, they crossed into Argentina at Puerto Falcon, located in the suburbs of Asuncion, in April, shortly after they were recruited. He explained that they should hold a rose and gave them a description of the person who would make contact with them. Two of the women indicated that they changed their minds and wanted to remain in Paraguay but Antonio got upset and stated that they had to go because he paid for their documents and tickets already. None of the victims were given any travel money for food or personal items.

Going to Work

¶4. When the women arrived in Buenos Aires (BA), the contact (name unknown) recognized the roses, took their documents and escorted them to a vehicle (owned by a remise service). They were driven 6 hours from BA to Ola Varrida (unsure of correct spelling - this was how the victim spelled it) to a farm called "La Quinta VIP". They said the owner identified himself as "Julio Araujo." All of the other women there, 8 in total including the 3 escaped victims, were all Paraguayan.

¶5. When they were recruited, they were told they would work in a restaurant and would earn 1,500 Argentine pesos per month. The real jobs, however, included strip dancing and prostitution. When a male client uttered the words "ir de pase," this meant he wanted to go to a room for sex. Each male client would pay them 30 pesos for 15 minutes. They were allowed to keep half. Each of the victims had to pay for room and board as well as for her clothes and personal items. This kept them in endless debt to Araujo.

The Great Escape

¶6. Early one morning in June 2006, according to the victim, while Araujo was asleep, the three women made their beds to appear as if they were sleeping and escaped through a window.

In very cool weather wearing little clothing and sneakers, the women ran more than 15 kilometers (9 miles) through the countryside. One of the victims said that Araujo passed them in his car as they hid in the wooded area nearby. A good samaritan picked them up along the rode and gave them shelter and food. This man also built a fire for them because they were shaking from the freezing temperatures.

¶7. The good samaritan took them to the local police station, where an officer contacted the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The women spent 22 days under the care of IOM in Buenos Aires where they received medical and psychological treatment as well as given USD 150 to pay for clothes and other personal items.

¶8. During the questioning by the psychiatrist, the victim also stated that the Argentine police paid a visit to "La Quinta VIP" but Araujo was not there. The women that remained at the location stated to the police that they were there of their own free will. (NOTE: The victim with whom Pol Intern met stated that one of the women at the farm monitors the others for Araujo and reports everything they say. The clear implication was that the other women could well be afraid to speak up. End Note.)

Back Home

¶9. On 7/13, the three female victims were repatriated to Asuncion. They will continue to receive medical and psychological treatment, provided by the Secretariat of Women's Issues, for several more months. The women all reside in the towns of Ypane and Limpio, both located in the Central Department, and will be commuting to Asuncion on a weekly basis. According to one of the victims, each of them are receiving good care in Asuncion. (NOTE: The interior government-run health clinics do not have the capacity to address the medical and psychological issues related to a trafficking victim. NGOs and local governments in the cities of Asuncion, Encarnacion and Ciudad del Este are the only places that can assist victims of trafficking. Smaller towns do not have people that have been trained to care for TIP victims. End Note.)

¶10. COMMENT: Recruiters are notorious for seeking out underaged girls as well. According to Zelaya, victims have indicated that recruiters have also visited schools and approached parents directly. The victims often tell similar stories of being told they would work in restaurants, supermarkets or stores but are later forced into prostitution

and threatened repeatedly. The documents that the victims are given are most often fraudulent, which makes it difficult to verify their identity and repatriate them back to Paraguay. Despite limited funds, Post continues to work with the GOP and consults with other governments and NGOs urging them to complement our efforts to provide assistance for the prevention and protection of victims as well as prosecution of perpetrators. End Comment.
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